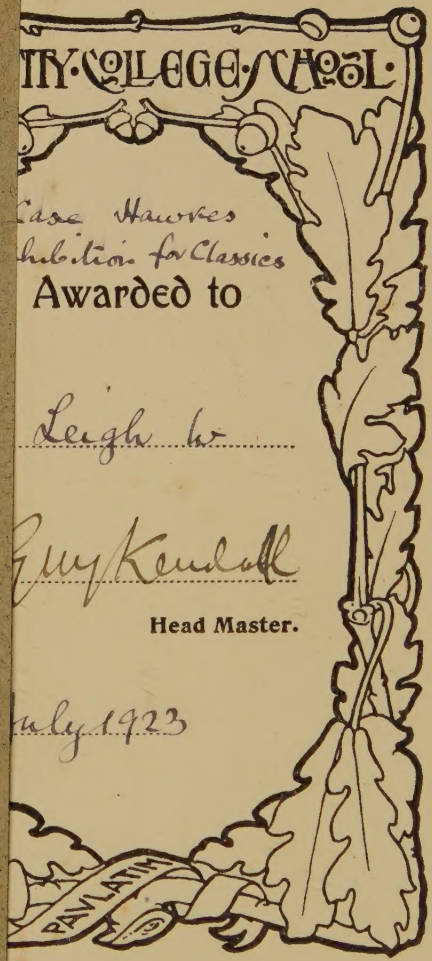
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THE TAKING OF HELEN

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John Masefield.

THE TAKING OF HELEN

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

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NIREUS was the son of the King of Symé Island. At his birth the gods brought gifts to him, each one thing; one wisdom, another courage, another skill. They gave him all good gifts except the gift of luck in love.

> That they forgot, or thought it wise to leave,
> Since men grow proud when nothing makes them grieve.

Nireus grew up to be a young man of every beauty and every grace.

Helen was born on the mainland. At her birth the goddesses brought gifts to her, of loveliness and sweetness. They gave her all good gifts, and this gift, too, that all men who saw her should love her, except her husband. She grew up to be the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. Menelaus, the King of Sparta, married her, and took her to live in his palace. He was an elderly man who cared not for her, but for drinking by the fire with the old Kings his friends.

Paris was the son of the King of Troy. At his birth the gods brought gifts to him of grace and courage and skill; and this gift, too, they gave him, that all beautiful women should love him, even if it led to tears and death. He grew up to be a fine young man but a wanderer. He came to Symé in his wanderings and there became the friend

of Nireus, so that the proverb began: "Nireus and Paris, the Eyes of Youth." This was said because they were lovely and alike and together. Paris was swifter of foot and a better archer than Nireus, but Nireus could run longer. Old men have said that together they were handsomer than two young stallions coming out of the forest in the morning.

After he had stayed with Nireus, Paris came to the court of King Menelaus, as all men did then, either to learn arms or to see Helen. It was deep peace in the world then, and had been for the seventy years of the life of Menelaus.

Now being in the court of King Menelaus, Paris loved Queen Helen and she him, as the wise gods had foreseen. He courted her with his youth and grace, and also with gifts from Troy, of gold and scarlet.

Helen loved him again, for, as they say in the islands, the rose turns toward the rose, not to the onion.

There were many young men at the Court at that time. Euphorion the painter was among them. He made the heads of Paris and Helen in coloured wax.

And at this time Prince Nireus came to the Court of Sparta. He, too, fell in love with Helen, but hopelessly, because Paris was there. He saw how Paris wooed her and how she loved him in return; his heart was sorrowful. He used to wander near the palace at night watching the

lights in her windows and thinking his heart out to her.

And though he longed to kill his friend Paris, he could not, because he knew that she loved him.

Many of the young men there were in love with Helen. They were jealous of Paris. Some of them spread tattle abroad, which came to Menelaus' ears.

> And Menelaus, little, old and bald,
> Peered after Helen with his ferret's eyes,
> And cackled at his jokes and thought them wise,
> And scratched his head because he had the scald.

One day Paris came to Nireus and asked him if he would lend him a ship, to take him out of the country in three days' time. Nireus said that he had a ship at the Green Havens which could take him. Paris thanked him, and asked him to keep the sailing secret.

As the ship-master was at the Court, waiting for orders, Nireus told him to be ready to sail within three days.

> It was the summer season, when the moth
> By dewy moonrise to the musk-rose go'th.
> It was a waning moontime; the moon's hull
> Sailed late to heaven, three days from her full.

That night as Nireus was wandering in the castle gardens, watching the windows and eating out his heart, he heard his name called, and there in the darkness was Queen Helen come to seek him. She said, "Nireus, I have watched you and think that you will be my friend; now be my friend and do what I ask of you."

He said, "Lady, anything that I can do for you, I will do."

She said, "Will you secretly cause one of your ships to be at the Green Havens at midnight three nights from now, ready to sail?"

He said, "One is there already ready to sail. Who shall sail in her?"

She said, "I shall, Nireus; for I cannot live here longer."

He said, "Lady, forgive me, but I think you will not be sailing alone."

She said, "No, Nireus, I shall sail with Paris; so there are our two lives in your hand."

He said, "Lady, a friend of yours is as yourself to me. But Green Havens is nearly twenty miles from here, over the moors; you will want horses to ride thither."

She said, "Paris has arranged for horses. We shall slip out of the castle at dusk and ride to Green Havens, and go on board and to sea."

"Lady," he said, "Love guard you, for I see that wisdom does not. But I am your friend, O my God."

She said, "I knew that you were a good man from your face."

He said, "Lady, I would that I could say something or do something to turn your heart from what you plan, for that might serve you; but since I cannot, I will do this: even to the death. I am a coin for you; spend me as you will."

Just at that moment there came the noise of

men in armour; it was the guard going round with lanterns. By the light of the lanterns Nireus could see Menelaus coming from the feast with the Captain of the guard. He put his cloak about Helen and drew her back among the flowers so that she might not be recognised.

That was the only time that he held her in all the time of his loving.

Five miles north along the coast from Green Havens is a brook's mouth in a bay sheltered from the north and east by rocks. Nireus had a second ship in this bay, loading timber. Early the next morning Nireus sent orders to the captain of this ship also to be ready to sail.

At the feast in the Court that night it seemed to Nireus that Menelaus was smiling. Menelaus was a little, elderly, precise man with a cunning face and grey beard. Nireus saw him at the feast licking his lips over a secret.

"Come, cousin Paris," Menelaus said, "come sit by me and drink to our friendship. And what lovely lady is the lucky one, cousin Paris?"

So he had Paris beside him at the high table and drank to him, talked to him in his high voice, in his silly manner, and at parting hugged him and clapped him on the shoulder.

After dark that night Nireus walked in the garden. He heard Roseflower, one of the queen's women, talking to Fragrance her friend. "Queen or no queen," Roseflower said, "she is no better than any of us, and the King ought to know it."

"Poor lady," Fragrance said, "you'd not betray her?"

"No, I don't say I would, but I ought to."

Nireus went to the court-armourer for a sword-chain that had needed a new link. While he was there Paris passed by; the armourer saw him by the firelight.

"Is Prince Paris a friend of yours, Prince?" the armourer asked. "If he be, Prince, say this: Kings' wives are dangerous."

"How, dangerous?"

"Kings may be glad of a good excuse for a quarrel."

"Prince Paris gives no excuse."

"Then tell him not to leave gloves behind him. Tell him to draw the curtains in the little third room in the tower."

"Speak plainly," Nireus said.

"I do plainly," the armourer said.

"Take my advice and use my shields,
And you'll be spared on battlefields."

Nireus went to the court of the guard to watch the setting of the guard. In the guard-room a soldier was singing as he scoured his greaves:

"Who would not be a prince from Troy,
The only joy of lovely queens?
And who would mind gloves left behind,
Since Kings are things,
Since Kings are things
With no suspicion what it means?"

Other soldiers laughed at this.

At this moment one of the courtiers, whom they called Brighteyes, came to Nireus with a message.

"Prince Nireus, His Majesty the King would be glad to have a word with you in the Rooms of Report."

"Do you know what he wants, Brighteyes?"

"He is giving out the pinks for courtesy and the stars for nobleness."

"No, but what does he want?"

"You."

Nireus went to the Rooms of Report. They were in a secret part of the castle where Menelaus saw his spies. There were three rooms; in the outer one, a guard or officer, in the middle one, nobody, and in the inner room, the King. When Nireus went up there was no officer in the outer room to announce his arrival. Nireus went into the middle room, there was nobody there, but the door into the innermost room was slightly ajar. King Menelaus was there, with others. Nireus drew back, to wait till he could be announced and received. Menelaus was sitting at a table and drumming on it with his fingers. Nireus heard him speak to someone.

"What is your report?" he said.

When the man answered, Nireus started, because the voice was that of a young man who was Paris's servant.

"Forgive my speaking low, lord," the man said, "but my news is so important that I dare not

trust it above a whisper." Nireus heard him bend low and whisper for a minute on end right into Menelaus' ear. He could not catch more than a few words of the message. "She said that she was sure of it." "I could not hear what he said, but he changed colour." "She was seen picking the rose."

"And the rose was on his table this evening, was it?" Menelaus said.

"O, a rose like it, my lord."

"How like it?"

"It was the deep yellow rose, lord, almost a red yellow, that only grows near the postern."

"And it was on his table?"

"One like it was, my lord."

"Was it?"

The spy mumbled on with his report, but Nireus could not catch more of it than a few scattered words.

Presently Menelaus rose from his chair to walk up and down the room. In his hand he had a pomander which he kept tossing and catching.

"But only the two horses?" he said suddenly.

"Yes, my lord, only the two."

"From the Two Brothers inn?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Good."

There was a silence after this for a little while, then the spy seemed to be dismissed by some inner door.

When he had gone, Menelaus went to the window

of the room, looked out into the dusk, and began to bite on his pomander. He had a way of smacking his lips on it whenever his thoughts pleased him. While he was smacking his lips over it, another man, who had not spoken until then, asked how the business went.

"I think they have it planned," Menelaus said, "for the night after to-morrow."

"What steps are you taking?" the other asked. He seemed to be a heavy man with a difficulty in breathing.

"I think," Menelaus said, "I think that it will not be very satisfactory for them."

"It seems all to fit in, like the stones in a wall," the heavy man said. "I have owed Priam a trouble for these twenty years; now his young puppy shall pay me."

"We have all owed Priam a trouble," Menelaus said. "But we shall pay him full measure."

"How were they planning to leave the country?"

"I imagine by a ship from Green Havens, belonging to this boy Nireus, who is here."

"Is he in their plot?"

"No. Paris's man thinks that Nireus hates Paris and wants him away from here."

"I do not wonder at that; he seems an insufferable young puppy, by what I have seen and heard."

"Nireus is no better."

"It will be good for these islanders and for all these other petty lords, that they learn who is their master."

"They will learn very soon," Menelaus said. "Paris will be stopped when he goes, and tried and hanged the next morning. What we think of Paris and his attempt will be told to Priam within ten days, and versions of it will be everywhere at the same time. Knowing Priam as we do, we can count on war within three weeks."

"I have been seeing those men," the heavy man said, "those men we talked of, from over there" (here he made some motion of direction with his head). "Some of them may be inclined to be perverse. There are wild ideas of independence abroad; they may need the strong hand."

"No, no," Menelaus said. "Do not beat the donkey; show him the corn. There will be booty in this. I am arranging that all those fellows shall know that there will be booty. What with some men's fears and other men's lusts, we shall have no trouble."

"There are one or two men," the heavy man said, "who need a little trouble."

"No, I think not," Menelaus said. "But if there should be such, there will be time enough later."

The heavy man shifted nearer to Menelaus and whispered to him. Nireus could not catch what was said, but guessed that a thing so secret must be evil indeed. Menelaus seemed not pleased with the thing suggested. He seemed to debate it, while he rubbed his chin with his left thumb, in a way he had.

"And then we should put in one of our own men," the heavy man went on, aloud, "because his son is only a child."

Menelaus was thoughtful, but did not answer. The heavy man went on with his persuasions.

"It is the only way to deal with such. He is a crafty one, and nothing binds him, neither word nor bond."

"He can be tempted," Menelaus said.

* * * * *

Nireus now drew away to the outer room, because both men were on their feet. The officer or guard returned to the outer room from his supper. He was an old, fat officer known as Wisdom. He announced Nireus to the King.

"Nireus," the King said, "they tell me that you run long distances. I have betted on your running twelve furlongs, to-morrow morning, against the stag-footed, the grandson of Aktor. Will you do this?"

"Lord, I will try, but he is a better runner than I. Where shall we run?"

"In the running-place at Port-of-Maidens."

"That is fifteen miles to the south of this."

"Does that dismay you? We shall go there to-night."

"To-night?"

"When the north wind rises. You, an islander, do not mind the sea? It will not affect your running? I have betted much upon you, because I hear that you outran Prince Paris."

"Only in the longer courses, lord."

"Yes," the heavy man answered. "Prince Paris will not stay for the longer courses." There was something very puffy, and slow, and grey-in-the-face about the heavy man, but there was beauty too. He wore the Blood Axe, as a sign, upon his vestments.

"Lord," Nireus said, "since we sail at midnight, may I go to prepare?"

"My men will do that for you," the King said. "In fact, have done it. We will eat a little fruit and so aboard. You run only the longer distances? Ah, when I was young, I used to run; the short dashes, eighty yards, one hundred yards, even the furlong. Once, when I was about your age, I raced Aktor himself at the Holy Games and beat him. You remember that?"

"Aktor was old, then," the heavy man said, "as well as unfit to run. He had a fever and should not have run. I was with him before the race and urged him not to run. No man ever beat Aktor in the dash. The fever and old age and heaviness beat him."

"I took Aktor's crown," Menelaus said. "He had a bigger head than mine, so that I could not wear it. The crowns at the Games were then of rosemary. I have it still, within there. Ah, come in, there. Here is the fruit; a little salad of grape-thinnings. Sit you here, Nireus, and eat a little fruit, for it is wholesome and good for the wind. Eat but a little dish of this, with a cup of

wine, and you will beat Aktor's grandson by twenty yards."

"He will not beat Aktor's grandson," the heavy man said. "A good runner has a set of the spine and a breadth in the nose, for the drawing of his wind, which this young fellow, nice lad as he is, has not."

As they ate and drank, King Menelaus talked of grapes, and of wines, and of foreign wines and of foreign ports, and of wonders, and of goddesses and of forest goddesses, and so to Paris of Troy, who had seen the forest goddesses.

"He is one of those," the King said, "who see the goddesses."

"Yes, lord, so it is said."

"It is said that he says that one of the goddesses had golden hair and that he share off a lock from it, and that he keeps the immortal hair about him, and that it glimmers in the dark."

"Truly, lord?"

"You are his friend. Did he never show it to you?"

"Never, lord."

Here the captain of the King's ship came to say that the wind was already havering and would soon be steady, if they would go aboard.

"Come, Nireus," the King said. "Give me your arm, we will go on board together. By the way, my lad, have you lost such a thing as a pair of gloves?"

"No, lord," Nireus said.

"Not a pair of scarlet gloves, with gold on them?"

"Never, lord."

"They have gold roses on them, worked in marvellous golden hair. The hair is so fine, it is fit for a queen or for a goddess. It glimmers in the dark. Do you never wear gloves?"

"Yes, lord, when I drive and when I box."

"Do you know what my father, who was a very wise man, used to say, Nireus, about leaving things about?"

"No, lord."

"He said, 'I leave people about, soldiers, even my queen, about. I can get others. But I do not leave things about, for when they go, they are gone.' I do as he says, Nireus. I do not leave gloves about."

They went on board the King's ship, the *Scatterer*, and at once sailed for Port-of-Maidens. On the way and all night long until the morning Nireus wondered how he could warn his beloved of the death that was drawing near to her. But he could send no message, since Menelaus had him to sleep in the King's Room. In the morning there were games at Port-of-Maidens, of swimming, leaping, boxing, wrestling and the running of men. Nireus ran against the grandson of Aktor, who beat him by twenty yards, over twelve furlongs.

After the racing, Nireus bathed in the sea, wondering how he could send a message to his beloved. He had heard the King say that they

would not return to the palace till the morning, but stay to feast and to sleep at Port-of-Maidens. On the beach there were some fishers who had been racing their boats. They had starfish, sponges, and rayed shells. One of them had a rayed shell twisted the left-hand way.

"Friend," Nireus said, "if I buy this of you, will you sail with it at once and bring it to the hands of Queen Helen? I am Nireus, of Symé, and I will give you each a milch-goat for the journey, and, for the shell, a silver cup set with crystals. My steward, who is at the palace, will pay you."

"Take it," one of the men said.

"But at the palace they will not let me come to the Queen."

"Then leave it for her, to be taken to her at once."

"What message am I to take with it?"

Nireus with his knife scratched in small upon the shell the arrow-head and dot which is the danger-mark of the Beggars. He knew that Helen knew this, because he had shown it to her, when they had been talking of marks, a few days before.

"Show her this mark, and say that Nireus of Symé sends the shell, as a most rare thing, to her who is peerless."

"It is a rare thing," one of the fishers said. "We draw up shells nearly every day, but never before have we drawn one twisted as that."

"Queens have ruled men ever since men were

children," Nireus said, "but never before has a queen like Queen Helen ruled. The unmatched shall go to the unequalled."

The fishers ran their boat into the sea, and stood in the sea beside her, while one of the men packed the shell in a frail. "Lord," this man said, "we have a saying among ourselves, 'Give the shell to the woman, but eat the fish yourself.'"

"Give this shell to the woman," Nireus said, "and you shall eat meat and drink wine, on the faith of a King's son."

As the boat set sail King Menelaus came down the beach to speak to Nireus.

"Nireus," he said, "you may be weary from running, but you are young. I have betted that you will run once more, a race of a mile, with our friend Brighteyes, who has just arrived from our Court. There he is. Take him aside and arrange conditions with him."

Nireus was glad to see Brighteyes, because he might have news of Helen.

"What news at Court, Brighteyes?" he asked.

"I have not been at Court since morning," Brighteyes said. "The Queen and all of us went over this morning to The Curlews, old Lord Halys's place, in the hills there, about eight miles from here. They will feast and sleep there."

"And not be at the palace to-night?"

"No, nor to-morrow night. Lord Halys sent over to fetch them. You are looking very white; do you think you ought to be running?"

"Yes, indeed. Is there a road to Lord Halys's?"

"Yes, a good straight track of turf leading over the hill there, past those beeches."

"Is Prince Paris also at Lord Halys's?"

"Constant as a wasp to the peach, or as a moth to the lantern."

"What made Lord Halys send for them? Is he a friend of theirs?"

"He is a friend of the King."

"Did you go with an escort?"

"Yes, with an escort."

"Come, Nireus," the King said, "since you have settled everything, you shall now run."

After beating Brighteyes by eleven yards over a mile, Nireus tried to slip away from the company, but the King brought him back to the guest-house. "You must stay for the feast," he said. "It is now about to begin, since the sun is setting. Come, sit by me, at the feast. We have here at the feast a strange thing which you shall see, a rayed shell, twisted the left-hand way; see, there, the strange shell, brought to me by some fishermen. It is marked by a mark like a bird's beak and eye, which some men say is the mark of the Egyptians, others the mark of rarity, others the mark of him who found it. What mark should you say that it is?"

"The mark of Nireus of Symé, lord, who sent this shell to your Queen to-day, as a strange thing, that might please her."

The King leaned across the table and broke the shell with his knife.

"Let us see," he said, "whether there be any little fish within the shell. No fish? See, now, we have broken a rarity but learned the truth. There is no little left-hand fish within the left-hand cover."

After the feast was at an end, some young men danced to them; then a poet sang to them, about the Killing of the Corn. While he was singing, Nireus edged away through the crowd to the door. After the song, King Menelaus said, "Let us now talk about marks, especially about the mark of Nireus of Symé, which is like a bird's beak and eye, and of such importance that it is cut upon rarities."

Nireus did not wait to talk about marks, but slipped from the door into the darkness, and along the street to the field where the horses stood at manger. He took the first that came handy, a little brown Argos mare, all kicking mad from the cold. He bridled her and swung her round and set off upon her up the hill for The Curlews.

> Under the moon the downland lay in seas;
> The brown mare kindled to it; at her tread
> The beetles of the grasses rose like bees
> To boom beside their bodies as they sped.

Three miles from Port-of-Maidens, Nireus came to a six-ways, where a dismounted man holding a resty horse, was trying to read the sign on the ground.

"Here," the man said, "which way to Port-of-Maidens?"

"Straight on to the south, with the lump of the hill to your right."

"Is the King there?"

"Yes. Which way to Lord Halys's?"

"Straight to the north. Keep up on the hill, don't go down."

"Is the Queen there?"

The man was already riding and swearing at his horse, but he turned and shouted something which sounded like "They'll tell you there." Nireus set off "straight to the north." In half an hour he saw the long white walls of Lord Halys's stables, and the house, with lit windows, above them. The dogs were barking in the kennels, as though wolves were about, but above the noise of the dogs Nireus heard the jingling of a troop of horse, trotting down into the valley to the east.

At Lord Halys's door there was a confusion of coming and going. Somebody hailed Nireus as a messenger from the King.

"I am not a messenger from the King," he said, "but I have a word for the Queen: may I see her?"

"See her? We do not know where she is."

"Surely she is here?"

"She was here. After supper she disappeared."

"Surely you know where she is?"

"Nobody knows. The escort is beating the hills. Lord Halys is distracted. She was seen going down the path to the Great Stones, three hours ago, and no one has seen her since."

"Was she alone?"

"She was alone when she was seen, but there is another who has disappeared, the Prince Paris, and now no one knows what to think."

"They have not been killed, have they?"

"The gods forbid. First, there was supper; then, after supper, there was to be singing, for musicians had come and were waiting. Then, when all had waited, Lord Halys's daughter went to bring the Queen, but she had gone. But, lord, this has distracted us all. Will you not alight and eat and drink? Here is wine at least."

As Nireus dismounted to drink, a man came rapidly up to the door. "Here is the farmer's wife from Fair Oaks," he said, "who says that there was a chariot with two horses waiting for half an hour in the river bed below the Stones. She saw it during supper time, as she came to the house with butter, and again half an hour later, as she went home. Two dark horses with a dark chariot. They were eating corn while tethered, and no one was with them. She says that she would know one of the horses because it wove as it ate."

"I will tell you what has happened," Nireus said. "This is the work of thieves or pirates, who have carried off the two to ransom."

"That is what we thought, lord, at the first; but there are no thieves nor pirates here There have not been for years; not since our King was a prince."

"Did any message come to the Queen, to call her from supper, or after supper; some word to bring her out of doors?"

"None, that we can hear of."

"Nor to the Prince?"

"Nobody knows."

"Which way are the soldiers seeking?"

"Down the track to Green Havens, and some up on the hills. We have sent to tell the King. God help our old Lord Halys; nothing like this has ever happened to him before. To lose a guest is to lose God."

"Are there any other tracks to the sea, by which pirates might come and go?"

"There are no pirates in this," a soldier said as he went past, "but a young man and his trollop and a moony night."

Nireus said, "I will go join the seekers. What other tracks to the sea are there?"

"Old tracks across the mountains that lead to the valleys. Green Havens is east from this, the next valley leads to Port Phenice, and the one beyond to Springs Bay."

"And how far? How many miles?"

"As many as God pleases, lord; it is all wild hill and rock; many who go out there at night are drowned in the bogs; and some are eaten by devils."

Nireus rode down to the river bed where the chariot had waited, but could learn little there, since the soldiers had ridden out the sign. "Those

two have had a warning," he thought, "and have fled. Now they are riding by one of these byways to Green Havens, straight to death, to where Menelaus expects them. I must go off by these byways and try to find them and head them off."

He rode a track into the mountains until the track gave out and then rode by the stars until the mist came down.

> In the mist's silences he wandered then
> To dropping alders in a dripping glen,
> Thence into forest, dense with mist, and mute
> Save for the dropping dew and pine-tree fruit.
> There the mare stiffened, trembled and stopped dead;
> A startled vixen crossed her path and fled.

"Someone has startled that fox," Nireus thought; "I wonder who."

He listened intently, but heard nothing, save the splashing of drops in the woods. A bird, scared by his lingering, went from a bush near him with a little cry and a creak of feathers. He seemed to be in a wilderness at the end of the world, where even light failed. His mare stumbled on a few feet further, and then stopped dead, nor could he budge her. Whether she felt, smelt, saw or heard something, he could not tell. Possibly she was scared by the smell of the fox; or had had enough of it. He turned her adrift and walked on.

After he had wandered on downhill for half an hour, he came to a thicket where the ground was soft. Somewhere in the thicket a hurt beast was whimpering; it stopped when it heard him, but

presently cried again, as though the pain had overcome all instincts; then, as he drew nearer to it, in the bog, it changed its tone, as a hurt beast will, so that he did not know whereabouts in the thicket it lay. Now it seemed ahead, then to a side, then even behind him, and this in a darkness, on a giving ground, which made him think of what the man had said, how some were swallowed in bogs and others eaten by devils.

He skirted the thicket and went on till suddenly he came to a kind of track across his line. He turned down it, out of woodland, into a space of bush and grass, where there was a noise of horses wrenching at their pasture. The horses were almost within reach before he saw them. They moved from him with a rattling of rein on wood that showed him that they were harnessed to a chariot. They were dark brown horses, and as he caught them and held them, he saw that one of them wove. They were cool to the touch, as though they had not been driven for more than an hour. One was bare. Over the other a soft cloak was dragging. The cloak was faintly scented with Queen Helen's favourite scent of verbena leaf. In one corner he could feel the Queen's device, of The Swan, done in gold. Plainly the runaways had been there, perhaps were there still.

"Paris," he called, "Paris! Are you there, Paris?"

There was no answer, nor any sound, nor any

sight, but the night dark with the change of morning. There were no tracks that he could read, no guide, nothing to go by. The runaways had been there and had left the horses deliberately, with time to think of the horses, since here was one of them covered with a cloak. They had come so far without disaster, but how long before had they come there, and where were they now?

"Paris," he called, "Paris!"

There was no answer, yet Nireus felt that Paris must be there, since how could he have gone on in the dark, with Helen, without horses?

"Paris," he called again. "Are you there, Paris? I am Nireus."

Having no answer, he climbed into the chariot and drove on along the track, which was littered with stones among which sage had sprouted; the horses crushed the sage till the air was full of the smell. He went on thus for a mile or more.

Then suddenly the track darkened ahead to a clump of trees, the horses whinnied and were challenged, a light shone, soldiers came out from the trees on both sides of the track and stopped his chariot.

"Is this the way to Green Havens?" Nireus asked.

"You're an islander by your speech," an officer said, "who are you?"

"I am Nireus of Symé."

"What brings you here at this time of night?"

"I have been with friends, and am driving back

to my ship, now lying at Green Havens. I have been lost all night among these hills."

"What friends have you been with?"

"They were at the big white farm in the hills to the west, The Curlews."

"Does anybody here know any farm in the hills of that name?"

"Yes, sir," said one of the soldiers. "It lies up near the lake, a matter of ten miles from here. Old Lord Halys owns it."

"That is the place," Nireus said.

"I was born up there, sir," the soldier said. "The shepherd's cottage was where my father lived."

"Why, your father was the shepherd, then?" Nireus said.

"Yes, sir. I expect you have heard tell of my father," the soldier said.

"Tell me," the officer said, "have you seen anything of a young man and woman since you were on the hills? A tall, slim man, of about your build, but with fair hair, and the girl the same?"

"No."

"That is what all say. Where have these two gone to?"

"Are you looking for a man and woman?" Nireus asked.

"Yes," the officer said, "we are, and we've got to have them."

"What wrong have they been doing?"

"That will be for others to prove."

"Will this track take me to Green Havens?" Nireus asked. "If it will, I had better be moving on."

"I don't know about that," the officer said. "My orders are to stop all passers, and you are a passer."

"But I shall lose the wind, it is beginning to fail now."

The officer hesitated. "I'm sorry," he said, "but orders must be obeyed. Wait a few minutes. The other troop will be here, then. You can apply to my chief. You see, this man and woman, we've got to have them. You'd better put your rugs over the horses; it's cold. Give us your rug."

"I'll do it," Nireus said. He climbed down and flung the Queen's cloak over the horses, so that the golden Swan could be tucked round a trace. Then he stood by his team and ran his hand down their legs, pulled their ears and made much of them. The soldiers stood about him, talking among themselves.

The soldier who had spoken about The Curlews edged shyly up to him.

"I hope, sir," he said, "I hope Lord Halys is not going to sell The Curlews."

"He did not mention it to me," Nireus said.

"Well, he was going to, sir, as you know."

"Yes, but that was some time ago surely?"

"No, sir; only last month."

"Indeed. I had not heard that."

"Perhaps you have not seen his lordship for some time, sir?"

"No, not for some time; but from what I could make out, he did not mean to sell The Curlews. It is a fine property."

"Perhaps you have not tried to make a living off it, sir."

"No, I have not."

"Talking about Lord Halys, sir," another soldier said, "perhaps you could tell us which troop of the guard it is that he commands. Is it the Blue troop or the Green?"

"The Green, isn't it?" Nireus asked.

"Surely, sir, you could tell us what coloured scarf he wears?"

"The gentleman is from the islands," the lad from The Curlews said, "perhaps he would not have noticed the scarf."

"Well, I say, myself," the other said, "that he commands the Blue Troop." He moved away sulkily to a little distance, from which he watched Nireus with disfavour.

"Horses are queer things," another soldier said. "They've each got a nature, if you understand what I mean. There's that horse of yours, sir, to take an instance now, he roots his head about as though he were dodging midges."

"That's weaving," the lad said. "When a horse does that, he is said to weave. And when a horse weaves, he is safe from being stolen, for it's like death or love, there's no cure for weaving."

"There's a cure for love," one of the soldiers said. "Run away with the lady for a month."

"That is the cure for folly," the lad from The Curlews said. "But nobody gets over love; it goes deep down and changes a man."

"It does," Nireus said.

"I was in love once," the soldier answered, "and at first I wanted to eat her; then, as my miss got uppish, I gave her one or two on the side of the head. That stopped her weaving; after that we got on better. Treat them rough, like you would dogs, and you won't ever suffer from love."

"Sir," the lad from The Curlews said to Nireus, "when you were at The Curlews, did you see Madame Fantasy, as they call her? Rather a big, brisk, bustling woman, with a bright colour?"

"No. Who is she?"

"She is the housekeeper there. She has made a lot of unpleasantness since she came into the house."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Well, you know what Lord Halys is, sir."

"That is too true," Nireus said, wishing that it were.

There came a noise of horses from down the glen; in a minute or two the other troop had ridden up.

"Any luck, my lord?" said the officer who had spoken to Nireus.

"No. They're not at Port Phenice. There's no ship in Phenice. One sailed this afternoon, but

that was too early for them. Who is this man in the cart?"

"He says he is going to Green Havens, from The Curlews, my lord, but lost his way, after the dinner."

"What is his name?"

"Nireus, my lord."

"Nireus! But that is a man we want. Where is he? Nireus." He turned to Nireus. "You are the owner of the ship now ready to sail in Green Havens?"

"Yes. I was going to sail in her."

"I know. You cannot. She is impounded. Certain people have disappeared and no ship is to sail till they are found. Have you seen anything of the people?"

"Nothing."

"Have you seen anyone to-night?"

"Not between leaving The Curlews and coming here."

"Well, I cannot think where they have disappeared to."

Here some more horsemen rode up, under the commandant of the three troops. The commandant knew Nireus and nodded to him.

"Seen anything of the runaways?"

"Nothing, lord."

"We've made a wide cast through the wood. They're not between this and the coast. We'll soon catch them when the day dawns, but in this darkness one can do nothing. It is a sad business,

Nireus. The lady is the Queen and the man Count Paris: sheer madness. And she was pretty, too, in a way. He was a sort of friend of yours, I think?"

"Yes, a friend."

"I'm afraid it will stop your sailing for to-night. I've been riding all night. I'm weary."

He slid from his horse and stood by Nireus's horses, with his hand on Helen's cloak. Nireus could see his hand move up and down upon the cloak as though he were interested in its softness, yet had not pushed the thought further.

"This is a beautiful cloak," he said at last. "It is soft enough for a lady's."

"Yes, it is a soft cloak," Nireus said. "What will be done to the runaways when they are caught?"

"She will be immured, of course. He is to be hanged."

"With no trial or enquiry? There may be some explanation."

"Those are the orders. There's no explanation. She is married to an old man, and he has had his head turned. I wish that this dawn would come, so that we might see."

"May I be pushing on towards Green Havens, if this be the way? I have been up all night and would gladly rest in my ship."

"You give me your word that you do not know where these runaways are?"

"I give you my word. I do not know where they are."

"Well, you may go. Let Prince Nireus pass there."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," the officer called Short put in. "With all deference and respect, my lord, might not this gentleman have left the couple somewhere? You see, my lord, it is odd his coming here, at this time of night, to-night of all nights."

"You hear that, Nireus?" the commandant said.

"Yes," Nireus answered, "I give you my word that I have not seen nor spoken with either of the couple for more than two days, that I know nothing of how they went nor whither, and that I do not know where they are now."

"Besides," another officer said, "you could not put three in that cart."

"True," Short answered, "but the third could have ridden, and then he could have hidden them."

There was a shifting among the troopers on the track.

"What is that noise in your troop, Short?" the commandant asked.

Short went to enquire and then returned, leading a horse.

"A trooper, sir, has just come in with one of their horses. He came upon it loose in the wood just below here."

Nireus saw at a glance that it was the brown Argos mare which had carried him from Port-of-Maidens.

"There's the horse," Short said. "The man

could have ridden and the lady driven in the cart with this gentleman."

"Why," Nireus said, "you can see that the horse is a runaway, marked with the Blood Axe, one of your own cavalry horses. If I be helping this couple to escape, and if these be our three horses, they must be close to this, where the horses are. You have been through and through all these woods. Why haven't you come upon them?"

"Because you have hidden them," Short said.

"Wait one moment, lord," a rider said, pushing up to the lantern light. "This gentleman in the cart was at The Curlews last night about midnight, four or five hours after the people were missed. I heard him say that he would join the seekers. He asked what tracks to the sea there were, and people told him he would be lost if he tried to find them at night."

"What were you doing at The Curlews?" the commandant asked the man.

"I am employed there," the man said. "I'm one of the stud-men."

"Is there anyone here who can prove that?"

"I can, sir," the lad said. "I used to live at The Curlews and can remember him, well."

"Very good," the commandant answered. "I needed no such evidence, Nireus, but that answers you, Short."

"Very well, sir," Short said, "I've nothing more to say. And you'll understand, Lord Nireus,

that my suspicions were my duty, nothing personal to yourself."

"Right, sir," Nireus said. "And you will understand that my indignation was due to an anxious night, and that I respect both your duty and yourself. And now may I be going?"

"You may; but this is not the way to Green Havens. You'll have to go down the way you came and turn to the right in the bottom. As a matter of form, will you report at my quarters at the inn, when you reach Green Havens?"

"I will."

Nireus turned his horses down the hill and leaned from the car to thank the stud-groom for his intervention.

"So it was you, sir," the stud-groom said, "it was you who had him after all."

"Had who?"

"The horse that wove."

"O yes," Nireus said.

"Well, well," the groom said, "everybody thought it was them who had him."

The lad from The Curlews came up to the cart and saluted.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "but would you be going up to Lord Halys's again, to The Curlews?"

"Not again," Nireus said. "I hope to sail to-day."

"If you should be going, sir—for things fall out very differently in life from what one plans—

perhaps you could tell someone that you saw me."

"Gladly, if I go there," Nireus said. "Do you mean your mother?"

"No, sir," the lad said. "It was not my mother whom I meant. But a girl who lives near there. There's no place like that place, is there, sir?"

"No place in the world."

"For if it is lonely, it is free. It is free, isn't it, sir?"

"As free as the birds above it."

"I was a great fool," the lad said. "But there was a girl up there. She married the grieve, so I came away. I could not stay there after that."

"I am sorry that you had that trouble."

"I suppose you did not see the grieve's wife, sir, while you were there? She had brown hair, cut short, like a boy's, and eyebrows that met."

"I did not see her," Nireus said.

"No, of course you would not have, sir. Thank you, sir." He saluted, turned his horse, and mixed again with his comrades, who were loitering there for daylight.

Nireus was free to go on.

From very far away a cock began
To tell of milking-time to slumbering man.
Now streaks in distant cloud turned pale and brightened,
Indistinct colour came as darkness lightened;
A bird went out to sea, and at his winging
Birds twittered in the trees or started singing.
The wind had dropped, the world was like a dream.

"Lovers are mad," said Nireus, "as I deem.
Why should I help my rival to my dear?
Were Paris caught and hanged, I need not fear
For her, so lovely; she would be forgiven.
I like a star might still be in her heaven,
See her, be near her, love her, die for her.
Yet if I died for her, it would not stir
Her heart for me, she likes the men who blaze
A path before them with their kindling ways,
Paris, Euphorion; never me, the fool.
O Love, you master with the bitter rule,
You make me dare all cruels for her sake.
Burning, I love the fire and the stake."

After a mile, he turned down another track on which horses had been ridden during the night; he could see no human footprints; it led through a wood, which dripped and was dark.

After another mile of soft going, the horses stopped, for they had had enough. He climbed down, unhitched them, hove the chariot into a bramble cover, and let the horses go. "You have served a queen and two kings' sons this night," he said; "may you live free in these glens for ever."

He clambered out of the wood on to a hillside in the daylight of a dull morning. He could see the sea, perhaps two miles away, straight in front of him beyond some trees. Fully four miles away to his right was a little town of red-roofed white houses on the very brink of the sea. Above it on the cliff, still further away, was the town stronghold, with a part of its wall fallen in the long peace.

As the town was Green Havens, he saw at once

that he had come as he had planned, well to the north of Green Havens, and near to his second ship. But where were the lovers? He could see some miles of glen, hill, scrub, woodland, with beasts grazing, smoke rising, life going on, but not the runaways. Soldiers were moving like dots down the glenside near the city.

"This is hopeless," Nireus said. "I have as much chance of finding them as the desert has of grass."

He went on for another mile and then stood upon a stone wall to look about. The sun was shining upon a pasture beyond the wall. Most of the pasture was burnt, but below the wall some grass, still green, was wet with dew, and on the dew were the footprints of a man and girl who had walked side by side there.

"Here they are," he said, "here they are! These are their tracks." He flung himself down and kissed what he thought were her footprints, and as he grovelled he groaned: "She will never walk by my side as she walks by his; never, never, never. Oh curse him, curse him for his luck; and bless her!"

There were only half-a-dozen steps in the dew, for they ceased where the grass ceased. He wiped them out with Helen's cloak and hurried on as they led. He went over three fields or enclosures into a lane, where he heard voices and stopped with a gasp, for there they were.

Beyond a curve in the lane was a roofless shrine

with flowers growing on its ruins. A broken column of grey stone in front of it still bore some relic of worship there. Some bunches of flowers had been laid there "for luck" by children or passers-by, out of custom that outlasts belief. Beside the temple was a little grove of aspens, whose leaves silvered and unsilvered in the wind and made a noise like rain. Out of the hill on which they grew came water of the hill, in a gush, to an old stone trough, over which the birds skimmed at gnats.

When Nireus looked, the truants were standing together near the stone. They had laid offerings of wild strawberries upon the altar. Helen had taken an old clay jug that had been left at the spring for the purpose, and had filled it at the spring. Now she was about to offer libation there.

It was at the moment when the light first fell upon that place. Helen was standing in front of the altar with the pitcher raised above her head. Her sleeves had fallen back, showing her arms bare to the elbows; the light was on her face. She was praying, but even in prayer her face seemed like a smile. Nireus had never seen her look so beautiful.

He looked at Paris. He, too, was beautiful, with the easy glow of the bright young man to whom life has not been difficult. He was standing a foot or two behind Helen, and a little to one side of her. When Nireus caught sight of him, he was watching Helen intently with a working mouth.

"My God," Nireus muttered. "What beauty and what ease and charm! O you lucky, beautiful fiend, I would love to kill you!"

But the water was poured, the rite was over; Nireus ran to them.

"In the name of the gods," he cried, "why are you stopping here?"

"We stopped to sacrifice," Helen said. "This is the Lovers' shrine."

"May the Lover bless you, then; but you may be seen at any instant."

"Why should we not be seen?" Paris asked.

"Why not?" Nireus said. "Tell me, what brought you here?"

"Love," Helen answered.

"Do not speak another word," Nireus said. "But hurry uphill with me to that copse. There we'll be hidden and can talk."

He hurried them uphill into the copse, which was mainly scrub and small oak, with firs in the high ground and ilex below. Some heifers were browsing in the scrub. At the top of the ridge, the hill tipped sharply down towards the sea, which could be both seen and heard, although a mighty thicket of berried evergreen shut the beach from view. Inside the thicket, a hundred yards from them, someone was beating mats.

"What are we to do now?" Paris asked.

"Get your breath first," Nireus said. "You surely know that you are being pursued, that you are in danger?"

"What of it?" Paris said. "We are within an hour of Green Havens, where your ship lies."

"Paris, my ship is impounded. Soldiers are guarding her and watching Green Havens. The country is thick with soldiers, hunting for you. I have another ship on the coast, among the rocks, three miles from here. She may be impounded too for all that I know, but she is your only hope."

"My only hope, Nireus? I think I have other hopes. Who is pursuing us?"

"The King," Nireus said. "If you will come aside with me to that clump of hazels, I will tell you what I know."

He took Paris aside and told him. They were in a thickish scrub on a hillside and talked in low voices, and heard not a sound; but when Nireus looked to one side, he saw a little boy watching them. He was a starved-looking little boy with a mean and eager face. He slunk away when he saw that he was seen, but he cast a shrewd look back and then ran.

"We had better consult with Helen," Paris said.

> Danger and love had brightened Helen's eyes.
> She wooed the wild things there with crumbs of bread.
> A goldfinch and a squirrel with small cries
> Reached little claws to her and took and fed.

"We have been seen here," Nireus said. "We must either hide or fly; which shall it be?"

"Where can we hide, whither can we fly?"

"I say get under cover, somewhere near here,

until dark, and then push on, over the rocks on the shore, to my ship," Nireus said.

"I will do nothing under cover," Paris said. "I have taken the King's wife and will wear her like my crown."

"Listen," Nireus said. "There are horses coming from the direction of the shrine. They are soldiers. That is armour jingling."

"It is not armour," Paris said. "It is a farmer's harness. Nireus seems to be in a state of terror. We must act calmly, Nireus, as well as proudly. We will go quietly down to the ship."

"Helen," Nireus said, "by everything you love come down to that thicket of evergreens."

His voice compelled her in spite of Paris. They hurried down the hill, followed a path through the thicket, crossed a nearly dry gully by a bridge, came to a rotting gate, pushed through it and looked about them.

"This is coming right into the trap," Paris said.

They had entered a court or yard of ruined stables and byres; fowls were picking about it; there was a look of ill-luck on it. They had hardly entered before some troopers rode down the hill just outside the thicket within fifty yards of them. Nireus hurried the truants forward into another, larger yard, at the back of a big low ruinous house, where a stout young woman was beating mats upon a line outside a door.

Her back was towards them, and what with

her beating and her snatches of song, she did not hear them.

> One, two, three, four (she sang),
> Love—no—man—more.
> Eight, seven, six, five,
> Men promise, till they wive,
> But seven, eight, nine, ten,
> Little love in man then.

As she paused for breath she heard them upon the paving and turned. She was a frank young woman with merry eyes and the look of a jolly boy. Nireus made up his mind instantly to trust her. He held up his hand and she looked at him pretty hard. Many thought him the comeliest young man of his time; she thought so, too, and as her song showed, she was ware of handsome young men; but she saw that Nireus saw her and wanted her as a jolly boy, and that pleased her, for that was how she thought of herself.

"Madam," Nireus said, "there are two lovers here, my dear friends; they are being pursued and will be killed if caught. Will you hide them?"

Her whole nature was there at once. Paris she summed up as nothing but a handsome young man, but Helen was of a kind she had never seen; she was Helen's slave thenceforth. Nireus saw her put out a shy finger to touch Helen's dress as she brought her to the door.

"Will the lady please to enter?" she said.

When they were all inside the door, in a damp stone passage, she looked at them and giggled.

"I do not know where I am to put you," she said. "Will they search the houses for you?"

"Yes," Nireus said. "And in a minute's time."

"Will the lady come this way?" she said.

"You must not go," Paris said. "Nireus, you ought not to have brought us here."

"I will go with this good girl anywhere," Helen said.

The girl caught Helen's hand and kissed it.

"We ought to be together," Paris said.

"We cannot save her: the girl may," Nireus said.

"Come," Helen said to the girl. "You will slip me into some cupboard, will you, with your dresses? I am not very big."

The girl led Helen swiftly away into the darkness of the house. Paris stamped on the floor.

"That girl would sell us all for a silver pin," he said. "I'll bring her back."

"She would die for any of us," Nireus said. "Besides, you have to trust her now."

"Thanks to you."

"Do not let us quarrel. Listen. There is a soldier in the courtyard."

Someone was indeed in the courtyard and coming to the door with a load that bumped upon him. The two princes backed into a store-room to avoid being seen. The man came right up to the door, and gave a whistle of invitation, in the hope of calling the girl. As it failed, he sang some lines of a song.

" There was a girl called Towzel Head,
Her eyes were bright, her lips were red.
Queen Helen, naked in her bed,
Was not so fine as Towzel Head."

As even the song failed to bring the girl, the man came right up to the door, looked in and called to her.

" Are you there, Myrtle? Are you there? Where have you got to? Are you entertaining all your fine friends? "

He listened for half a minute, then muttered to himself, " Ah, she is away ! " and resigned himself to going. He seemed to fill buckets at a well, and then bore slowly away with his load, singing, till he was out of earshot up the hill.

The girl reappeared.

" Where have you hidden the lady? " Paris asked.

" I will not say," she said. " She is hidden. I will hide you."

" Tell me where the lady is," Paris said, " in case I have to go to her."

" There are soldiers riding to the front of the house," she said. " Will you come? "

She took Paris hastily along a passage and up some steps. Nireus heard the soldiers approaching; he took off his princely coat and thrust it into an oil jar. The girl came back for him.

" I have nowhere to put you," she said, " and the men are at the door there."

" Can I hide in the well-house? "

" No, there's no room."

"Let me out here, then," he said. "Where can I find a pick and shovel?"

"There, by the cart."

"I'll get into the gully then and dig a basin for the brook."

At the other side of the house a dismounted horseman was already rattling at the door, and crying, "Is there anyone inside there?" While the girl went through the house to open the door, Nireus took pick and shovel, scrambled into the gully and began to dig. He heard the soldiers go into the house, rummage about and drag things out of corners. Presently they left the house, and came beating and peering among the tamarisks in the gully. One of them asked Nireus what he was doing.

"Making a catchment for the brook."

"It ought to be hot work."

"Pretty well. What are you doing?"

"Looking for a man and a woman."

"Weren't you doing that last evening?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you found them yet?"

"No."

"What have they done?"

"They've been doing reasons of state, and we've got to have them."

"They wouldn't come to a place like this."

"You're right. A ruin like this. The girl's a nice piece."

"She's my sister," Nireus said.

"You'd ought to be proud of her," the trooper said.

"I am."

The sergeant in charge of the men came out at this point, wiping his mouth.

"No trace of them in the house," he said. "We'll follow down this gully to the sea and beat all the scrub. Who is the young fellow here?"

"The girl's brother, digging a catchment."

"By God, it's in the family!" the sergeant said. "She's dug a scratchment in my cheeks, I know." He walked with energy but a little unsteadily down into the gully and thrust at the scrub with his lance as he went. His men followed him and did the same: the horse-holders followed slowly along the gully top leading the horses: Nireus went on with his work. In a few minutes the soldiers were out of earshot down the gully. Nireus looked up and saw the girl looking down upon him.

"Will you help me shift my mats?" she said.

When he had carried her mats indoors for her, she said:

"What is the worst they have done?"

"Love each other," he said. "How did the soldiers miss them?"

"They did not look in the right places. Nor in the wrong much, for that matter."

"They'll come back," Nireus said, "for we were seen by a little boy before we came here."

"A little sharp thin boy?"

"Yes."

"He will tell," the girl said. "They will come back."

"If they come back with an officer," Nireus

said, "they will search like the north wind. Will they find them then?"

"There is no place to hide them in this old ruin."

"Is there any other place?"

"No. Everybody is searching all over the countryside. I cannot think how you escaped to come here."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"There was a man calling you, just before the soldiers came."

"That is Steer. He tends the cows above. I do not know how he missed seeing you."

"You have been a rare friend to us. I say, the gods bless you."

The girl tossed her head.

"I've told the soldiers that you are my sister."

"You should not have done that," she said. "My brothers are dead; all here know that."

"Whose house is this?"

"The old lady's. She is never about till evening, though: she sleeps."

"Has she no husband?"

"Yes, The Sightless; but he is away. He is often away. Go back to the gully now; it is safer."

Some hours later, Nireus heard horse-hoofs returning to the house. It was the same squad of men, but this time they were under an officer, who had with him the boy who had seen them in the wood. They dismounted at the door. Nireus heard the officer speak to the boy.

"Since you know the house, show me the possible hiding-places in it."

The boy led the way into the house; some soldiers followed; others stayed outside by the horses. Nireus listened for what might happen.

"What are you listening at?" said a voice above him.

It was the sergeant, who had crept along the gully top out of sight of Nireus and had been watching him.

"I was listening to what was going on."

"It's no concern of yours," the sergeant said. "You get on with your work; you and your sister and your sour thin wine. You'd sing if I had my way with you."

Nireus did not answer, but bowed to his work.

"One scratch and then another," the sergeant said, "with your little hands like woman's hands. I promise you, I'd make you work if I'd the charge of you."

"Sergeant, there!" came the voice of the officer near the house.

"Sir!"

"Come and show me where you searched."

"Yes, sir."

Nireus went on with his digging while the men trampled about in the house, moving coffers and stores and faggots, but finding nothing. In time they came out to their horses, growling at their want of luck.

"Who is that man digging there?" the officer said.

"The girl's brother, sir."

"You examined him?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's my belief," the officer said, "that this boy was put up to bring us back here as a blind. We'll search round where we met the boy."

They rode slowly away.

When they had gone, the girl came out to speak to Nireus.

"If I had not changed them," she said, "they would both have been found."

"Perhaps the worst is past now," he said.

"They've been offering rewards, they say," she said. "They will try hard for the rewards yet."

"I'd better go back to my digging," he said.

"You are not much used to digging, I think. You will find fat in the tallow room if your hands are sore."

She went into the house and he returned to his digging. Presently some girls came to the house and chattered with Myrtle at the door. After some minutes, another girl came hurrying up with important news.

"Girls," she said, "I've heard who the people are."

"Who? Who are they?"

"She was the wife of old Lord Halys, who lived up in the hills, a long way from here, and they had a young lord there to stay, and she and the young lord became lovers, and old Lord Halys discovered it, so they killed him."

"Murdered him?"

"Yes."

"Who says this?"

"Mother heard it from one of the soldiers who had been with old Lord Halys."

"His wife and the young lord killed him?"

"They bled him slowly to death, the soldier told mother; and she must have helped, the soldier said, and perhaps was the worse of the two."

"How did the soldier know?"

"I don't know, but of course he knew."

"When did they do the murder?"

"Yesterday afternoon, he said. They had it all planned out to escape; and they'd locked up the body in the woollen store, for who would want woollens in this weather? And then last night, you remember how cold it was at dusk, this soldier's mother wanted a blanket. She is a steward or housekeeper there and has a key; so she went to the store; and there:—just as they'd murdered him."

"They say a murdered body groans when it is first found."

"No, it groans when it sees the murderer. And mother says that just when the woman opened the door the murderers went past, and the body groaned. It groaned a hollow, ghastly groan: she said it made her sick to hear it."

"Oh!"

"Oh!"

"The poor old man!"

"Although he was old, it wasn't his fault that he was old."

"That is like these great ladies, who think

themselves so fine; they've no hearts like other people."

"What will be done to them when they catch them?"

"They are to be burned, mother says; and oh, Myrtle, if we could only catch them! There is to be a reward, to anyone who even says where they are. One of the soldiers with a trumpet was proclaiming it. The person who catches either of them is to have two long hundreds in silver, and the person who says where they are is to have one hundred."

"Yes, and there is to be a punishment for hiding them. Anyone helping them will be whipped in the street and then blinded."

"I shouldn't think that many people would help low murderers like that," Myrtle said.

"Oh, I hope," another said, "that I shall see them caught, the confident things!"

"I wish," another said, "that they would catch them and go away. One likes to see soldiers, of course, at a distance and so on, but they are so rude, and then they stare so."

"Well, we must be going back to our work. Won't you come with us, Myrtle?"

"No, I've got too much to do, and then the old lady might wake."

"Aren't you afraid, being all alone here? Suppose the murderers were to come and murder you?"

"Not likely," Myrtle said. "If they come murdering me, they'll be shot in a soft place with a dry mop."

For a long time after the girls had gone, Nireus

kept very still in his gully, since women notice everything, particularly strange young men.

Myrtle came out to him presently with some buttermilk.

"Your friends aren't murderers," she said.

"No," he answered. "My friends are the Queen and Prince Paris of Troy, and they are running away because they love each other. I am Nireus, Prince of Symé."

"Their friend?"

"You may call it that. My girl, Myrtle," he said, "I've put you into danger by bringing them here. When I came here I knew nothing of any punishment proclaimed."

"You know nothing of anything," she said. "And never will, but it is not knowing that gets things done. Wait till they're caught before you talk of danger. You would do well to sleep, prince; everybody sleeps through the nooning here. You've a look, of not having slept, which might make people think."

Though he did not know it, he was so dizzy from want of sleep, that voices seemed speaking in his ears, telling him to do this or that. The heat of the summer day grew greater over his head. The aspens, that had been pattering, were quieter, the poultry ruffled into the dust in shadow, only the grasshoppers and the lizards seemed alive. The purr of the grasshoppers, the creaking of the crickets in the trees, the whisper of the aspens, and the trickle of the water at his feet, mixed into a noise of sighing, into a noise like the breathing of

a sleeper. "I will lie down," he said to himself. "I will lie down among the tamarisks for a few minutes. That will refresh me, and be at the same time no danger, for of course I shall not sleep." So he lay down among the tamarisks and noticed their toughness and their glitter, and covered his eyes against the glare of the sun that shone through them, and instantly was asleep fathoms deep.

In his sleep he had some feeling that Myrtle ought to have brought him food; then this changed to the certainty that something was wrong, and he leaped up, feeling for weapons. He saw at a glance that the sun had southed and was westing, and that he had slept for four hours at the least. There was alarm in the air and a noise of horsemen on the trot. Peering out from cover, he saw soldiers dismounting at the door. They were commanded by a big, rather fat, fair man with a corrupt face. "Take me into the house," this man said, "and show me exactly where you searched." Plainly this officer was much less easily satisfied than the others had been. Soon he came into the courtyard and looked among the ruins.

"Sergeant, there?"

"Sir."

"You say you searched these ruins?"

"Yes, sir, thoroughly."

"How could you have searched them thoroughly when the grass isn't beaten down?"

"I'll ride through it, sir."

"How can they be in grass, man, if it isn't beaten down? Lieutenant, there!"

"Sir."

"What is this man in the gully?"

"The girl's brother, sir, digging a water-trap."

"You, man, there!"

"Sir."

"Come up here."

Nireus climbed up the side of the gully till he was within a few feet of the officer, who looked at him hard.

"How long have you been here?"

"All day, sir."

"What do you mean by all day?"

"Since daybreak, sir."

"In the gully all the time?"

"All but a minute or two, sir."

"You've seen nothing of these people we're looking for?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Was he here when you were here, lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir. We questioned him."

"He was digging?"

"Yes, sir."

"Boy," the officer said to Nireus, "you seem a likely lad. Why do you stay digging here, instead of seeking your fortune, a lad like you? Don't you want a horse to ride and a sword by your side?"

"I've my relatives to consider, sir."

"I'm sure they would not stand in the way of your advancement. You ought not to be digging here, you ought to be in a smart troop like this, and see something of the world before the bend is in your shoulders."

"I'm their only support, sir."

"Very proper that you should think of that, of course, but you ought to think a little of yourself."

"I cannot, with them, sir."

"I must think for you, then. I will speak to your relatives."

"I am sure, sir, I am much obliged, but they will never let me go."

"They'll have to let you go. The King wants lads like you."

"I am an only son, sir."

"So am I, my lad. Where do your people live?"

"Live, sir?"

"Yes, live; lodge."

"Do you mean where they are now, sir, or where they are when they are at home?"

"Where they are now, of course."

"They are harvesters, sir: they have gone away north to the harvest. I don't know exactly where they are now, but I hope to hear, sir, soon."

"Then you are not their only support?"

"Sir, even the very old can help in the harvest."

"That is so. I don't like your answers, my lad. They smack to me of the shirk. You and I will meet again."

He turned abruptly from Nireus to look at the house.

"Girl," he said to Myrtle, "what is that upper floor above there?"

"There, sir? The pigeon-loft or dovecot."

Nireus was watching the girl's face as she spoke; he saw it harden as though it were an effort to

answer, and knew at once that one of the two was in the dovecot.

"Did you search the dovecot, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"You did not? Why not?"

"I saw no way to it, sir."

"You, boy, where is the way to it?"

"I am not employed in the house, sir."

"No, but you know the house. Show me the way to it."

"I will show you the way to it," Myrtle said. "Indeed, he is not employed in the house. Will you come this way, sir?"

As they moved off towards the courtyard the officer turned upon his underlings.

"You have been here twice and the place is not half searched even now."

Nireus followed the party a step or two behind them. At the doorway, as he stooped to enter, the officer saw him.

"You, boy," he said, "what do you want, following us?"

"I thought I might be of use, sir."

"What use?"

"To protect my sister, sir."

"Come along, then."

They went indoors and upstairs, along a corridor, through three ruinous rooms to a fourth with a roof of larch-poles.

"I looked in here, sir," said the younger officer.

"Where is the dovecot?"

"Through that door in the wall at the end, sir."

About half way up in the end wall was a square wooden door on leather hinges. It was locked as well as hasped-and-stapled, and behind it was the shuffling, sidling, and roo-coo-ing of pigeons.

"Fetch up the log there," Myrtle said. "Then I can stand to unlock it."

The log was a stump of uprooted tree, the men hove it up, Myrtle stood upon it, scraped some cobwebs from the door, opened it, flung the door wide and jumped down.

"You can see for yourself, sir," she said.

The officer climbed up and looked in.

"Here's a filthy place, in need of scraping," he said. The birds fluttered and scrambled and knocked down the cloggings of months.

"Are they not there, sir?"

The officer leaped down from the log, dusted himself with his fly-flap, and looked about the room.

"No, they're not there," he said. "But that doesn't prove that they haven't been there, or weren't there this morning. The cote has been opened recently."

"The man Steer was in it yesterday, catching squabs for the lady," Myrtle said.

Nireus looked up at the ceiling of the room. It was a rude ceiling of larch-poles laid together in their bark, perhaps six feet above his head. The larch-poles were ill-laid, some had rotted and fallen and been taken for firewood, while the work had always been of the roughest. In a gap between two poles just over Nireus' head a rag or end of gold cloth was dangling. Nireus recognised it at

once as the fringe of Paris's mantle. About four inches of it dangled down, and Nireus knew when he saw it that Paris was lying there just above his head.

The officer moved up again to the dovecot door, to examine it more closely.

"By your own confession," he said to his underling, "you were in here this morning, hunting for political prisoners upon whose capture the King himself sets the utmost importance, yet you did not open this door, nor search the cote. You may have been within six feet of them."

"Sir," the young man answered, "the cote was full of doves when I was here. The prisoners could not have been there."

"You were trusted to search and did not search. It is odd that you young fools cannot be left two minutes by yourselves."

"I am afraid, sir," Myrtle said, "that you have made yourself in rather a mess in the cote among the doves. It is a mucky place at this season. When you come to the kitchen I'll fetch you a sponge."

The officer looked at his soiled gear.

"What is this room used for?" he asked.

"I believe it was a spinning-room in the old lord's time, sir," Myrtle said. "But it is not used now, except sometimes as a store."

The officer looked about it and snuffed.

"A queer smell here," he said. "It is not quite the pigeons. It smells like the smell of some scent."

He stood there sniffing the air, turning his head as a dog does, to catch the scent. Nireus knew

very well that he had caught the scent of the herbs in which Paris's cloak had been laid. A keen-scented man might easily have smelled this from a few feet away.

"I expect that what you smell, sir, is the foreign bark," Myrtle said. "A foreign ship was wrecked here three Septembers ago, and the men drowned. They were dark men, with thin faces, and they all wore red of some kind. And some foreign bark was washed ashore from the wreck, and what was found was laid here. Men said it was spice bark. It lay here a long time, in the corner there, and the room still smells of it a little. We had seven bales of it."

She went to the corner of the room from which Nireus had taken the log: the officer followed.

"This was where we stored it," she said, "but afterwards it was claimed and taken."

The officer sniffed and made a doubtful nose there.

"I suppose that that was it," he said. "Yet it seemed stronger over there."

"Yes?" Myrtle said. "I suppose it came in a gust of wind."

The officer did not answer, but walked uneasily about the end of the room like a dog whose bone has been taken.

"After all," he said at length, "they were last seen near here."

"Well, here are the house and grounds, sir," Myrtle said.

"I'm not blaming you," he said, "any more than I am acquitting you." He turned to his underling.

"What we ought to have had was dogs," he

said. "If we had had dogs from the first, we should have caught them." He went moodily to a gap in the wall from which he could look down into the gully where Nireus had worked.

"I suppose," he said, "you didn't beat the gully?"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said. "We went right through it till it ends on the beach."

"I'm surprised," he said.

"Sir," said his underling, "shall I call in the men to go through the house and beat everything thoroughly?"

"You will call the men in when I tell you to, and I shall tell you to when I choose."

"Certainly, sir."

"If you had done your duty at the first we might not have been powdering here in this way."

"Yes, sir."

"I say, No, sir."

"No, sir."

The commander walked to look through the gap in the wall from three different angles.

"It's odd," he said, "but I am quite sure they are somewhere here; my instinct tells me they are. But where, is the problem."

"I hope, sir," Myrtle said, "that you would not suspect me of having anything to do with them?"

"I'm not so sure," he said.

"If you're not sure, sir, please search the place and clear me."

"That's what I am going to do, my girl."

But still he hesitated and seemed uncertain. He made one or two sharp turns, and then said:

"I'll have that woollen store turned out."

"Sir," said his underling, "the store was turned out from top to bottom under my eyes, and I had up a plank of the floor and probed beneath it."

"As you were, with the store, then. But they are somewhere here."

"I have an idea," he added suddenly. Nireus started and Myrtle looked hard at him; they thought for an instant that he had seen the truth.

"Come," he said, "we'll be out of this." He walked rapidly to the door of the room, as though going out of it, and then, on the very threshold, he paused and looked up.

"What is above these poles?" he asked.

"Just the roofing, sir," Myrtle said.

"There should be a space between the poles and the roof."

"Look there, sir, where the pole has gone. You can see that the tiles come right down." Indeed, at that place they did.

"Very good," he said, "very good for just that place; but how do I know that it is like that all along the room?"

"You can test it, sir, in one or two places, where the poles are rotted."

He went to one such place and peered up into the darkness of a gap. Taking a lance from the sergeant, he groped there with the lance-head till crumbs of rotting wood, wet with a black mildew, fell into his eyes.

"Not room for much there, sir," said his underling.

"What are those rag things drooping down from the poles?" the officer asked.

The sergeant reached with the lance and brought down some of the rag things: they were clottings of cobweb with dirt.

"Come," the officer said, "we'll be out of this. They aren't here." He looked hard at Nireus as he spoke, as though searching his face for some gleam of satisfaction; but Nireus was well warned and had his face under control. The soldiers rode away; Nireus returned to his digging.

About an hour later, there was a noise of crying and cheering setting away towards Green Havens, as though the hunt were up in that direction. While he listened to the noise, he was hailed by Paris, who looked hot, dirty and white.

"What are you doing there?" Paris asked.

"Making a sort of water trap, by digging a hollow and lining it with stones."

"I am coming down to help you."

"Yes, but your safety?"

"I am not going to hide any more. In the first place it is unworthy, and in the second it is very uncomfortable, and in the third, men cannot alter their fates beyond a point." He flung off his gilded cloak and stooped to the task. "Oh, it is joy," he said, "not to be cramped up any more."

"Where is Helen?" Nireus asked.

"Indoors; the girl is with her."

"And if the soldiers come again?"

"If they come, they come. If I'm to die here, I will die."

"I will keep a look-out," Nireus said.

"Do not do anything so suspicious," Paris said. "Help me dig this trap and leave Helen with the girl."

"How did you escape the searchers?" Nireus asked.

"Because fortune is with me at this time, as I knew she would be. The girl put me in a pitch-black cellar at first, behind some casks; and I was hardly settled in before the men were searching the house for me. They came down into my cellar and were very close to me, but could not have seen me, without moving the casks. If they had had an officer with them, they would have moved the casks, but the men who had been sent there were idlers. They knocked at the casks to see if they were full and every time they knocked on a full one they asked, 'Is there a spigot in it?' or 'Is it tapped?' Then they rummaged about for something to steal, and kept growling about the place's poverty. Presently the sergeant came down, and asked if they had found anything to drink. They told him No. And he said, 'By the gods, boys, you're lucky. The girl gave me a drink, and by the gods it was gall.' He asked if they had moved all the casks, and they said, Yes, every one, right out from the wall, and searched behind them. Then they stayed there growling for a while, talking about their officers, and then the sergeant said they had better be moving. Then they went.

"That was the first search. After that I had a sleep, but then the girl roused me, to change my

hiding-place. She said she was not satisfied. She gave me some food and then put me in the dovecot, where the doves made such a noise that I could not hear what was happening. However, I fell asleep and slept for hours. What woke me was a man's voice just below me, outside the house, asking if anyone had searched the dovecot. A pretty question, Nireus, for I was locked in there; and then, another thing, I knew the man. He's one of the guard. You may not have heard of him, but they call him Lusty. If he were not obstinate as a mule, he would be as sharp as a weasel. When I heard him I was all alive in two seconds, for I thought that I was caught.

"There was not much that I could do, shut up there, like a rat in a trap. But looking round in the dimness, after I'd gone round once or twice, I wondered if I could not squeeze through on to the larch-poles. I did not think this possible till I had to. Then I swung myself up, and found that I could just do it, so I did; I crawled in and lay down upon the larch-poles, and a horrid bed they made. They groaned under me, and bent, and I thought they would give way. Then the worst was that they shifted, whenever I moved, and made little gaps through which my clothes kept falling, and there were little spiders in the bark; they ran all over me, and tickled; and then dust from the bark came into my nose and made me wish to sneeze. Then I heard you coming along to search the cot, so I made an effort to make myself comfortable before you arrived, and in my wriggles a

fold of my cloak fell through a gap between the poles and caught in a stub on one of them and I could not get it clear before you were there. Why Lusty never saw it, I cannot think."

"He very nearly did see you. He smelt you. I saw you plainly enough. What I would like to know is, why you came away the day before you had arranged."

"It was unworthy to stay longer."

"Did you know that you were betrayed by your man, and that you were watched? You were. The King had prepared everything to catch you."

"These people who prepare things are generally beaten."

"Paris," Nireus said, "we have been friends, but for these last months I have longed to kill you, because I love Helen. You may never get away from here; but if you do, it will be through me, so that I have the right to say this. Go to Rhodes, or to Crete, or to Egypt, or come with me to Symé; but keep from Troy, Paris, because you do not know how full Troy's cup is; nor how this will set it running over."

"You are an islander, Nireus," Paris said, "and pay too much attention to flaws and currents and gusts from the glens. Troy is a great kingdom, and a haunt of kings; my queen shall be another glory to her."

"Do you know what you are doing, Paris? You are all blind with beauty and love and think that no one sees but you."

"You are in love, you say," Paris answered. "Do you see so very clearly?"

"I am in hell," Nireus answered, "and have all hell's fire to light me. You are taking the one you love to misery."

"And you would give both hands to be in my place."

"I would give more than that, perhaps," Nireus said. "I used to think, Paris, that I could never care for anyone as I cared for you. When you first came to Symé and we were companions, it was the world to me, for I was an islander, as you say. I used to lie awake, thinking that no one ever had so wonderful a friend; nor had anyone. When I look at you now, it comes back; nothing can spoil that. But when I saw Helen, that went into its place; and presently I hated you. I may die to-night, in trying to help you, and I shall deserve it, for I know very well, Paris, that evil will come of this. If I die, try to remember it, and love her as she deserves, if you can."

"I do not like you as a preacher, Nireus," Paris said. "Do you know how I feel to-night? Like a runner coming up the Straight, with his last man beaten and all the thousands roaring for him. We are youth and beauty against the world, and the world goes down before us. O God, I am happy, Nireus!"

"You have reason to be," Nireus answered. "I ask, will she be happy, presently? This is to bring war to Troy, so much is planned. That will

not make for happiness. The war will spread and spread, and who can see the end of a war? Keep out of Troy, Paris."

"A likely thing for the King's son to keep out of Troy, with Troy at war!"

"You will be the cause of the war. You will be her husband, answerable for her happiness. Yet you will bring her into the midst of the calamity you will cause?"

"You croak like a raven," Paris said. "You have lived for too long upon your island. In Troy, these Kings, whose war you dread, seem petty enough. Menelaus and the other and their friends, what are they? How can they come to Troy?"

"Troy has enemies enough, with ships enough."

"They will need all their ships. And when they come to Troy, if they ever do, they will see the Asian war and nothing more forever. So there is for your calamity. Fight for Helen? I expect to fight for her, I glory in the thought of fighting for her. I have challenged the old man and any of his champions: I lust for the day when I can end them."

"You will have to fight for her," Nireus said; "so will others, who will not lust for that day. Helen will be in the city of those others, who will curse her and spit upon her as she passes by."

"I tell you, Nireus," Paris said, "that your talk is unworthy of a generous mind. Troy is glorious in her war, as in her peace and in her love."

"A great part of love is not glorious," Nireus said, "but bitter sacrifice and pain. I know that now, and Helen will know it, but you will never

know it. I think, if you make her unhappy, I shall feel it in my bones, and for all those old times in Symé, I will hunt you out and kill you."

"It is ill talking about killing," Paris said, "to a man upon his wedding day."

"It is ill talking about the future," Nireus answered, "when none of us three may see to-morrow. She and you and I are in deadly peril of our lives. It is now sunset. I will set out to my ship, to see if you can sail this night. If I am taken, let us both remember that we have been friends."

"Bring up your tools and come in," Myrtle said from above them, "for no one works here after hours. Wipe your tools clean, or put them in the house, for if Steer should see them when he comes, he might remark upon them."

They did as they were bid, just as the sun went down. Nireus set out alone to the north to see if his ship were free to sail; Myrtle went south to Green Havens, to learn what was being done and said; the lovers were left together.

On the sea-beach, before the rocks began, Nireus met an old man, who was staring out to sea, watching the rising of a planet. "Sometimes she is not here," he said, "but when she is, I come to watch her. She comes up out of Asia, where all things begin, and now, as you see, she comes with her red brother, the hunter; she wants love and he wants blood, for all they are so lovely. When I was a boy they came thus, and the King took another love, and there was fighting everywhere. They float in the sky, looking down, and they

make men love and kill, and then they float on, and as they float they sing, of what is in their minds, which has nothing to do with us."

"We love and kill and go on," Nireus said. "And we sing what is in our minds, which has nothing to do with them, but with the fate of man."

"Nobody knows what the fate of man is," the old man said.

"It is to try and suffer and try and perish," Nireus said.

"When I was young," the old man said, "I thought it was to love and to go with companions, pulling kings from their thrones, in these cities. But that is the youth of man, not the fate. I think the fate of man is to stand on a sea-beach and see the planets rising, and talk folly."

"Wisdom is not far from folly," Nireus said.

"Fate is very near to folly," the old man said. "And that is why the blood planet goes with the folly planet. A lover has always a dog at his heels, even Fate."

"The dogs of Fate have been hunting here to-day," Nireus said.

"Not hunting," the old man said, "but gathering to a hunt, a great hunt, which will put all beauty and pride and skill into the mud."

Those globes of light, the planets, lifted free,
And shook their glittering hair upon the sea.
The inner fires of the water glowed,
Flame rippled where the dolphin took his road,
Flame pointed where the surfaced shark was finning,
Flame shivered in the bays from wind beginning.

* * * * *

Nireus went on over the rocks till he came to the cliffs, where there was a cave, in front of which a fire was burning. A little dark man was cooking a pot of shell-fish at the fire; he had very bright eyes which looked askant.

"Are the soldiers on the rocks here?" Nireus asked.

"No, lord," the man answered.

"Thank you."

"What do you want with the soldiers?" the man said.

"To be without them."

"Well, there are soldiers, then, within a mile of you. They are looking for you, and when they catch you, they will hang you, and you will deserve your death, for a man who gives up a good life for a woman is fit for burial."

"What do you know of me?" Nireus asked.

"Nothing, and want to know less," the man said. "But I gave up a good life for a woman, and I know how such look and what they come to. But now I'll have neither woman nor friend, nor be bothered with a home nor a city nor a state. I'll live like a bird and be happy like a bird, nor rot my heart out nor my hands off for anyone. But I'll come to see you hanged, for a neck that carries a head so daft as to give up all for a woman, is a neck that I'd love to see stretched."

Nireus went along the cliffs till he came to the beach where his ship lay. She was moored to the rocks at the mouth of a stream. On the cliff-tops, two hundred yards inland, in a field, a fire was

burning; soldiers were passing to and fro in its light.

"The soldiers are there, lord," the ship-master said. "They say that we are not to sail."

"Have they put guards on board?"

"Yes, lord, a guard is on the rocks there."

"Are they looking for me?"

"No, lord, they are looking for a man and a woman. They searched in the balks for them. There's something about a soldier that reminds me of the man that fought the dust-storm; they've got more spunk than sense."

Nireus climbed to the rocks to speak to the guard, who was walking up and down on the rocks beside the ship. He was the lad from The Curlews, whom he had met during the night.

"You have not found them yet?" he asked.

"No, lord, not yet. But I am glad that you have come here, lord, because the general has been asking for you. The officers reported that they had met you in the night, and he said that he wished to see you, if you came to either of your ships. He is up by the fire there, having his supper. I will report that you are here, lord."

"Do," Nireus said. "Meanwhile I will make ready to go to him."

He had hardly washed and changed to clean raiment before the general was on board. He was the officer whom Paris had called Lusty; he was now not Lusty but weary from his day.

"Are you that Nireus?" he asked.

"I am a Nireus."

"You were in the wood early this morning, going, as you said, to Green Havens, to your ship. You have not been to your ship there. Where have you been?"

"I lost my way in the woods, wore out my horses, came to a farm and resolved to eat and rest there."

"What farm was this?"

"A farm up the glen, three or four miles from here."

"And you passed the day there, and came here now. Why have you not gone to Green Havens?"

"It is seven miles away, and my horses are lame."

"How did you come here now?"

"I walked over the rocks."

"Were you questioned by my pickets?"

"I saw no pickets."

"Was this farm, where you slept, searched by troops during the day?"

"Yes, I heard troops rummaging there."

"Did they question you?"

"They said that I was not the man they wanted."

"Who was it, who said this; an officer?"

"A sergeant."

At this moment an officer came towards the general, saluted, and said something in a low voice.

"What? what? what?" the general said. He went apart to talk with the officer, then returned to Nireus.

"For the present," he said, "no ship is to sail from this coast; those are the King's orders. You will therefore stay here till you have a licence under the King's seal to sail."

"I beg your pardon, my lord soldier," the ship's master said, "but is this King who gives the orders King Menelaus?"

"Yes."

"Then, my lord soldier, this ship is not in his territory. King Menelaus' border is that stream. The rocks on this side the stream are in King Mekisteus' territory, and so are we."

"Is that the fact?" the general asked.

"Yes, lord," his officer said.

"Very good," the general said. "As you were. In that case I will simply say to you, Nireus, that King Menelaus will resent very strongly any help given to these runaways of whom you have heard the story. Have you seen anything of them, by the way; do you know anything?"

"I passed my word of honour that I knew nothing of them, to your subordinate, in the wood this morning," Nireus said. "My word of honour as a prince must suffice. I have now answered many questions to you and to your soldiers; I will answer no more. But, none the less, you must let me offer you refreshment, such as my ship has, for you must be weary from your search."

"I do not like your tone of speech," the general said. "Nor will His Majesty, to whom I shall make my report. Even islanders may find it wiser to use another tone in the King's cause."

"I use no tone but that of courtesy," Nireus said. "As a wanderer I offer another wanderer refreshment."

The general clambered from the ship on to the

rocks, and from thence to the shore, followed by his officer. The guard from The Curlews spoke to Nireus.

"Lord," he said, "I am glad to have seen you again. We are likely to be moving off again in a few moments. There is said to be a warehouse in Green Havens, where wool is stored. We are going to search there by torchlight."

"Is that the King's storehouse?" Nireus asked.

"I do not know, lord, whose it is, but it is an old house falling to ruin, where people could hide."

"Guard, there, come on out of that," the sergeant called from the beach. "What do you mean by talking on duty? Get on up back to your horse and be ready to march."

When he had gone, Nireus scrambled up the cliff into the fields and set off running across the pasture towards the house where his friends were. When he came to a holy tree, stuck about with offerings, he paused to add a rag from his clothes, as a propitiation; then he ran again, till he saw the trees about the house. A shrill voice called something after him at this point: he stopped to listen, but did not answer; then he ran on again, till he was among the trees. Here, as he heard loud talking and hurry, he crouched down. About a dozen men and lads were coming hurriedly down the hill. One of the men was saying:

"Boys, we'd better run, or the soldiers will be finished before we get there."

"That's true," another said. "There's not much wool there."

"What there is, is all destroyed," another said. "The rats and the moth are in it."

They hurried past, knocking at the bushes with their sticks; some of them sang lines of songs. Nireus followed them, but soon saw that they were not going to the house; they passed it by and went on, as though for Green Havens. When he had made sure that they were on their road, he turned back, and as he turned, he saw the figure of a boy, standing among the bushes watching him. The boy glided back into covert and then ran, as soon as he saw that he was seen. Nireus went to the house, crept round it, till he saw a glimmer at a shuttered window; here he tapped an appointed signal till Paris opened to him. He climbed down into a little room wavering with shadows from a burning rush stuck in a bowl of sheep-fat. The room was like a tomb on which the door was shut, except that the rats were making merry in the wall. He looked at the dear face of Helen and at the proud face of Paris, with the thought that he was helping them to ruin.

"Is the girl back?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you been searched again?"

"No."

"How have you passed the day, Helen?"

"First in the woollen store, where the soldiers moved the wool close to me, till one of them said, 'They can't be here; no one could breathe.' After they had gone, the girl came to me and moved the wool so that I could climb out, and she

had a sponge and some icy-cold water to revive me. Then she said she would call me if there were any danger. She put me in her bed (she had decked it all with flowers for me), and I slept. Then she called me up and hid me in a little recess, which she said had been made long ago for women, in the old days, when there were pirates on the coast. I was there for a long while, and heard them routing about. Since then, I have been here."

"If we go to my ship now," Nireus said, "we may fall in with soldiers or people anywhere. If we stay here, that boy has seen me again, and he may be bringing people here."

"We had better go," Paris said. "Was not that a footstep outside?"

"It was the creeper stirring," Nireus said. "I say stay here awhile. The countryside is roused and all are going to Green Havens to search some wool-stores. It is two rough miles to my ship. Later, there will be a moon and fewer people."

"I say, wait only for half an hour here," Helen said. "Then they will be intent upon their search; now they are but going to it."

"I say, get out into the night," Paris said, "for in the night one is free and hidden; here we are shut in and hidden. And I keep thinking that I hear a footstep. I am sure that there is a footstep, of somebody with a treacherous step."

"There is a footstep coming to the courtyard door," Helen said. "There is someone tapping there."

They heard a rapping on the door, repeated several times; then a man's voice called:

"Are you there, Myrtle? Are you inside, there?"

They remained silent, looking at each other.

"That's a neighbour," Paris whispered. "From these parts, by his accent."

There came a louder banging on the door, and the man cried:

"Come on, now, let me in, Myrtle; where are you?"

"He's coming round to the other door," Nireus said. "He's an old man and walks with a stick."

They heard the shuffling of his feet passing round the house and the pecking of the stick at each step. Soon they heard him knocking on the door at the front of the house, and growling or swearing to himself between the knocks. The house was so still that the knocking rang through it like cockcrow.

"He will wake the old lady," Helen said.

"He means to waken someone," Paris said.

Plainly the old man did mean to waken someone, for he now banged on the door with all his anger.

"Are you all dead there, are you all mad or drunk, or what is it? Wake up and let me in. Will you let me in, or am I to break down the door? You baggage and jade and she-cat, gone trolloping with your soldiers. Lords, open, will you? Open, or we'll make you open!"

"Someone is going to open to him," Helen said. "It must be the girl come back."

"It is not the girl," Nireus said. "It is the old lady, wakened."

"It is the old lady," Paris said. "Shall we put out the light?"

"Keep it burning," Helen said. "We are her guests here."

From somewhere in the heart of the house the step of age shuffled and the breath of age wheezed. An old, old creature was coming to the door wheezing and muttering. They heard her. "O, dear me! O, my poor heart! O, dear! O, my poor back! O, the gods pity me! O, it's too long a way, a dear." They heard her pass along the passage outside the room in which they were, and then on, to the door, calling out to the knocker that she was coming. Soon she was fumbling at the bolts and trying to pull them back. Paris, looking out, saw her there, wheezing and fumbling, lit by a rushlight which she had laid upon a stone. The flame blew about and flung shadows, while the fingers tried to slip the bolt.

"There it is," she said, as the bolt fell back. "Come in now, if it's you, The Sightless."

As the door opened, the wind blew in so wildly that the light danced on the rush as though it would blow out. Somebody came in from the night and slammed the door behind him.

"Who else would come to this house?" the man said. "Not many, I should think."

"Not many, indeed," the old lady said. "My heart's very bad to-night. Go you to the kitchen."

"Your heart's well enough not to keep me

waiting at the door, one would think," the man said. "I've seen the time when a princess would open the door to me and princes bring me my drink."

"The latter end of our time is for reflection," the old woman muttered, as she followed him. "To think it all out in the dark, when we've lived it all out in the light."

The man paid no heed to what she said, but strode forward. Paris could see that he was indeed The Sightless, being a man long blind from a wound in the head. He was a big man, with the milky seamed face of the Sightless; on his face was all the tragedy of the bitterness of a soul who had found no compensation for being blind, not even in thirty years. He strode along the corridor like one who knew it well; all was darkness to him. As he went, he muttered some lines of a poem:

"I came, with three black ships, from many-tossing Leros,
Whose trees the northwind shakes, the oak-trees good for ships.
I was the loveliest man of all my fifty seamen,
None had such arms as I, nor such a chest, nor strength."

As he came abreast of Paris, the sense of the blind made him turn towards him. He muttered: "Princes are here again. Misfortune follows princes." He strode up to the door and stared down upon them with eyes that could not see.

"Welcome to the poet," Nireus said.

"It is long since a prince bade me welcome," The Sightless said.

"A princess bids you welcome," Helen said.

"What brings a beautiful princess to this house of misfortune?" he said. "Is it misfortune?"

"Fortune," she said. "Lovely fortune." And she looked at Paris with the eyes of a lover.

"There are three of you here and one of you has not spoken," The Sightless said. "Time was, when I was not sightless, that everyone would have greeted me."

"I greet you last," Paris said, "because I, too, am a poet, and was shaping a greeting in verse."

"Sit down among us," Helen said.

There was a noise of shuffling and wheezing at the door of the room. The old lady was there, holding up her rushlight to look at them. She was short of breath, but either past alarm, or too full of pains to trouble about the presence of strangers in the house. Perhaps she did not see that they were strangers; or perhaps, being extreme old, on the brink, daily, of other worlds, she was not sure if those she saw were of this world, or hallucinations.

"Madam," Helen said, "your maid let us rest here. We thank you for the shelter you have given us."

"Ah, dear me," she said, "you're welcome, you're welcome. So the maid let you rest here? A good maid, a good maid."

"I don't know that she is so good," The Sightless said, "to leave the house, so that I stand in the dark for hours." He went growling out of the room.

"You must not mind him," the old woman said. "He is still not used to this, for he is a man, and men will chafe, where women see the will of God."

"That is very true, madam," Paris said.

"I hope, madam," Helen said, "that you are not in sorrow here, that he should chafe."

"I sometimes think that it is all sorrow," she said, and began to cry with the silly sad tears of old age.

"Ah, madam," Helen said, going to her and stroking her hand. "It cannot be all sorrow, for he is a great poet and you have helped him, as you have helped us."

"A dear," the old woman said, "I was forgetting the broth."

Myrtle came in at that instant. "I have the broth," she said, "and I have grapes and bread and an honeycomb."

"May we all eat together?" Helen asked.

"I have not eaten with princesses these many years," the old lady said.

"It is time the princesses had better luck," Nireus said.

Myrtle ran to the kitchen to fetch The Sightless, who was swallowing his soup by the fire there.

"Get you out of it," he said. "I'll eat with none but my thoughts, for there is bitterness in all things to me, save in them."

Paris had followed Myrtle to the kitchen, from the fear, lest the old man should wander out and tell men that there were strangers there.

"Sir," he said, "it is because of that that we would have you with us. Let us have your thoughts, lest our meal be a bitterness; a princess and two princes beg you."

"Young man," the blind man said, "once, when I was a man, before I became this thing, I was a prince myself, but now I have forgotten the ways of princes."

"Sir," Paris said, "you are our host, as well as a great poet. Will you not give three wanderers the privilege of saying that they were once your guests?"

The girl looked from Paris to the blind man, wondering that her life in the ruin should suddenly be filled with princes. The blind man rose.

"There is small privilege in being a guest here," he said. "All is ruin and desolation and the latter end."

"The latter end is the beginning of the new thing," Helen said. She had followed her lover so as to be with him, and now stood in the kitchen doorway with one hand on Paris's arm, and the other on Myrtle's shoulder.

"For me there will be no new thing," the blind man said. "Only old darkness. But since you plan to trouble that darkness, I will come." He dropped the horn spoon on the floor and moved forward.

"The broth is burned," he said, "but since you insist, you shall eat it. Bring the broth, you, Myrtle," he added.

"I will help you, Myrtle," Helen said.

He spoke little during the meal, but when it was over, and the wine had been passed, he said:

"I have made poems of many things, but of one thing I have never made a poem, and that is of myself. Are you handsome and strong and quick-witted and good spearmen? I was all those things, far more than you. And I was a prince, being the son of the King of Leros, the most beautiful and the most fertile and the most famous of all the islands. I went travelling on the main-

land, and wherever I came they took me for a god, I was so beautiful and so strong. Till I came to the castle of a King whose name I will not now remember, a great King, lord of many lands, and rich and old, and married to a young wife."

The ancient lady settled to her chair.
Long living with her man had made her face
Like his, a blind one, milky with despair,
With no joy left for sorrow to erase.

"Married to a young wife," the blind man repeated, "a very beautiful girl, the daughter of a King, and, some said, of a goddess. There is no beauty in the world now; it was all burned up in her. They tell me of the beauties now, but they are dead leaves, they are ashes, they are ghosts. Beauty has been done in flesh, it cannot be repeated. Before I became this thing I saw it. And the King, gods serve us, her husband, a little mean peeping tiptoe man, a grey thing, buttoned up in gilt, with a face like a weasel. God makes such fellows kings, because God is not a man, and he tumbles such fellows down because some men are.

"He had long red boots of soft leather, laced to the knee, Asian fashion, which he loved better than his wife. I said he had a face like a weasel. There is blood and life in a weasel's face; this man had a face like a fish. Down in the town there, in the fishers' row, you will see the heads of the fish cut off, and the dogs worry them and the men tread them and they look sad. That was his face, but always peeping round a corner; with a little grey hair and no beard.

"The thing had power there, at that time, in that land. It is the mystery of man, whose mind goes cruising in Heaven, that he will take any fool for a governor."

"That is the wisdom of man," Paris said, "for his only alternative is a knave."

"Man has no wisdom," the blind man said. "Man is blind, and the blind are not wise, but sometimes they are impatient. Will you talk more folly, or shall I go on with my tale?"

"Go on, sir," Paris said. "I was rude to interrupt an older man than myself."

"Not rude, sir," the blind man said, "only young."

"I fear it is the same thing, sir," Paris said.

"Many think so," the blind man said, "but the many err as often as the few, and there are more of them, and they mind less."

"Will you tell us more of this King, sir?" Nireus asked.

"More of him? There was no more of him," the blind man said. "He was an outside, with soft red boots to the knee, and routine for the rest. One quality he had, if you can call it a quality." He drooped his head while he thought of the old king's quality, but contempt grew upon his face as he thought, whatever it was, he could not call it a quality; he put it fiercely from him.

"Out of the routine, he was the shell of a sucked egg," he said. "He was less, for with egg-shell you can make, whatever it is you make with egg-shell. Gods serve us, why do I speak of him?

"I tied him in his throne with my own hands, in a game, and afterwards I took his wife.

"Upon a dewy morning we went to hunt the stag.
We held the hounds outside; the huntsman rode the cover;
When my stallion heard the horn his mane shook like a flag,
My heart leaped like the stag, as I looked upon my lover.

"The King was there; not that he ever hunted, but it was his routine, to do whatever was done.

"There was trodden sage there and the smell of the horses, and we were seven miles from the sea. So I and his wife rode up to him, before all his Court, and there I told him that she was mine, and that if he had anything to say let him say it. Say it? He had nothing to say. He giggled.

"I rode along the whole of that Court; she beside me; and I told them that she was mine. They were his creatures; they had bows and spears, and we defied them. They did nothing. They looked at him, then they looked at us; then they looked away."

There was silence; the blind man was lost in his thoughts; somebody had to say something.

"That was a triumphant moment for you," Nireus said.

"Was it?" the blind man said. "It felt so, at the time. To be young and splendid, and to have your love, and to defy the world for it, and to stake your all on it; there is a triumph in that, perhaps."

"There is indeed," Helen said.

"But no. It is not a triumph," the blind man said, "it is a defiance; and that is a gesture."

"A fine gesture," Paris said.

"Was it?" the blind man said. "I did the wild thing and the generous thing. I put myself upon the cast and flung, and I looked to them to do the wild and generous thing, and they did not do it. They looked and looked away. They did not care, did not care enough; we did not matter enough.

"If they had done something or said something, it would have been easy, for we were white hot.

"I tell you, their silence was the first wound, the first touch of death in all that glory of life. We rode away, we two; and I despised them; and yet, that night, on board our ship, going out into the world, their silence came back, it was a judgment. It was like a frost in spring. And the next day it haunted me, and ever since. It was inertia; it was routine; the things that run this world. I had dared them and they were stronger than I, infinitely stronger. Inertia goes on and routine presses till one is out of the world.

"And it did; for that was our last glimpse of life in the world. In the routine, we had been queen and prince, riding out with the Court to hunt the stag. It was a dewy morning and the air smelt of trodden sage, and she was riding a white and I was riding a stallion, and the world ministered to our pleasure. Out of the routine, we were wanderers, with a story on our heads, a story against us. They were wise, those courtiers who looked away. What need to lift a finger? The arrow was in us and would rankle.

"For a time we were young, and then we were not young, and then I became this thing, and now

I am old. While I had my sight, they were glad of me, those men in the routine, wherever I went. They used me, my courage, my wit, my skill. They praised me, they rewarded me; not too well. I was a man, which they were not; till this happened in my head.

"Now my light is out, and I have nothing but a few verses, after the old style, which nobody wants. I've done all and dared all and spent all, and have been nothing and am nothing, while those twenty men who looked and looked away are still powers in their state, using the men like me, as they choose. Sometimes I think I am perhaps not a man but a Force or Daimon bringing in a sort of fire from beyond life, while the world pours sand upon me. Sometimes I think . . ."

He paused; he did not say what he sometimes thought, but gulped at his wine and thrust the cup down upon the table in his hand like a claw.

"What do you think?" he asked. "You are young. You are of the routine. You should be able to tell me."

"Sir," Nireus said, "is it not with men as with the stars, that most are steady, some wandering, now near, now far, and some blazing and hurrying and shedding change as they go? You burn and wander as a comet, perhaps, and can have no settled place nor peace."

"Sir," Paris said, "life cannot offer all things to all men. It offers one choice only, to be yourself, or to be as another chooses. You chose to be yourself, like the wild goat on the hills; others

choose to be tame goats in the fold. What do you think, my dear one?" He turned to Helen.

"Madam," Helen said to the old lady, "I should like to hear what you think, for a poet told me once that the man sees his life as a picture of all his desires, and forgives no thwartings of them; while the woman sees his life as her child, perhaps crippled, perhaps wicked, but hers still, to love or to forgive. Surely wisdom is where forgiveness is; so it is for the woman to speak."

"I," the old woman said, "I think that life is the shepherd of sheep and very hard to all who break from the pen. All that we women can do is to try to make it less hard for those, and in trying we sometimes make it harder; as I have done for you, my dear. But if I made it harsher for you, it has been all glorious for myself, so that I thank the gods that I have lived near the light all my days and seen it grow the brighter as the clouds came. I was a queen once, and it was nothing; but ever since then I have been with the kingly, and it has been all the world, my dear."

"There, there," the blind man said.

"Madam," Myrtle said to Helen, "the wind is beginning to sound in the trees. If you were to set out soon you would be at your ship before it really sets in, and before the moon is up."

"Yes," Paris said, "the wind is rising. It will be fresh off shore in an hour from now."

"We will start, then," Helen said, "if you are ready."

"I am ready," Nireus said.

"I will set you on your way," Myrtle said; "it is a long mile to the rocks and the young bulls may be loose on the pasture."

"I will come with you," The Sightless said, "because you are my guests, and the darkness is my daylight."

"And you must take some honey and wine and the apples, and the new bread if it has set," the old lady said. "These little baskets that I make will be so handy for you to carry. And some woollens from the wool store, Myrtle, because they do not know how cold it is at night, on the sea, when the wind sets in to blow."

"And they must have my hunting spear," The Sightless said. "For I hear that they have no weapons, and the world is a rough place to those who cannot be rough to it. It was a good spear in my day," he said, bringing out the spear. "It may serve you, lord." He gave it to Paris, for he had the blind man's sense of the colours of the souls about him.

"You will not refuse it, lord," he said. "Age is good for nothing but for this one thing, that it can furnish the setter-forth, if the setter-forth will permit."

"Sir," Paris said, "we cannot thank you enough for all your kindnesses to us and all your gifts and help."

"One other thing I would like to beg, sir," Nireus said. "And that is, that you would sing to us one of your poems before we go."

"I will sing to you, perhaps, on your way, sir,"

the blind man said, "for this is not the house for singing, nor is it the time. The girl has the things there. We will set out."

They made their farewells and started towards the rocks. Helen walked with Myrtle. The Sightless with Paris, and Nireus alone behind them. They went down a rocky track and turned out of it to the right by a path through a cornfield which Myrtle said was a short cut to the sea. They saw the sea, and then stopped dead in the corn, at the sound of horses and the jingle of armour.

"Horsemen coming along the beach from Port Phenice," the blind man said. "They are soldiers marching in twos. They will turn up the track there and we shall just miss them."

They heard the horsemen leave the beach and turn up the rocky track. The horses struck and stumbled on the stones, and the men, who were now as weary as the horses, swore at them.

"Come on with you, and search the house another time."

"He that made twice made three times."

"Why can't he burn it, and be done with it?"

"He thinks we'll catch them this time."

"Catch them! he! Catch a weasel asleep!"

"Less cackle in the ranks there!"

"Sergeant, there!"

"Sir?"

"Can't you stop that cackle in front?"

"Yes, sir. D'ye hear, there? Stop that cackle in front, or by the gods I'll come in among some of you!"

The horses passed on towards the house, with the riders muttering among themselves. When all had gone, the lovers set out with their guides, out of the cornfield, and over the nearly dry bed of the brook, to the beach where the sea was breaking. The wind was setting out from the land and making the water alive. They could look for a fair wind. Presently they were at the rocks where the ship lay waiting for them in the creek. Her sail had been hoisted but not sheeted; it hung slatting in its gear. The master of the ship welcomed Nireus.

"They've been here again, sir," he said, "looking for you. They've been asking us all sorts of questions," he said, "about why we were here. But they were only soldiers. There's something about a soldier," he said, "that reminds me of the western lands, where fat and folly go fine. But I suppose you will be sailing, sir?"

"Sir," Nireus said to the blind man, "will you not sing to us before we go?"

"I will sing after you are safely gone, young man," The Sightless said. "There are soldiers riding down from my house in this direction at this moment. That poisonous boy at the corner saw us as we passed, and has told them."

"I saw no boy."

"There is always a boy at the corner. What is done is seen, and what is seen is told, and what is told is avenged. But if it were he or not, there are the horses."

The master and Paris had helped Helen on board.

Paris shook hands with the blind man. The noise of the horse-hoofs was plain enough now on the beach, within five hundred yards, and drawing nearer.

"We had better shove off," Nireus said. "They are near."

"Plenty of time, sir," the master said. "They cannot use their horses over these rocks." He began to cast loose the stern-fasts while a man in the half darkness hove the turns of the bow-fast off the rocks.

"Sir," Nireus said to the blind man, "had not you and Myrtle better be going from here? You may be had in question about us. Persuade him to go, Myrtle, will you not?"

"I attend my guests till they are out of sight and out of hearing," the blind man said. "And I am too old to change my habit because a boy is afraid."

"I am not afraid," Nireus said. "But I am grateful for a noble kindness and would hate myself if you were troubled for it."

"A little trouble the more will not hurt me," the blind man said.

"Now, my lord," the master said to Nireus, "if you will step aboard, we will shove off."

"Good-bye, Myrtle. And bless and thank you for your kindness. And good-bye to you, sir."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Let go forward," the master said. "Jump in aft."

The starboard oars backed her off and the bow

oars gave her way. She moved forward as Nireus reached her deck. Helen and Paris were standing there waving their farewells. Nireus heard Myrtle sob; an oar-blade scraped on a rock and splashed into the water, the rowlocks grunted as the rowing began. The master ran to the steering oar and pulled three vigorous strokes and the ship slid onward and away.

"Overhaul your gear and sheet home," the master cried.

Nireus saw the black shapes of horsemen ride up against the sky on the little knoll beyond the rocks. He could no longer see Myrtle and The Sightless, for they stood lower down and were merged in the darkness of the boulders. Helen stood beside him, staring out to sea; her fair hair was blowing in the wind and tears were running down her face. An old sailor forward at the sheets began to sing a hauling song:

"Give all for love, my bon-ny boys,
And ask for no re-turn-a,
For sorrow follows after joys,
And that's the way to learn-a.

"I had a lovely love so fair,
I gave my all to woo-a,
She took my friend and left me bare,
For that's the way they do-a.

"She stripped me naked to the mire,
And off away she ranged-a,
For men are hurt by their desire,
But who would have it changed-a?"

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